

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

NOTES ON THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON FOR DECEMBER 7.

The Brighter Side of the Rude Days of the Judges.

I. The General Preparation (Judg. 17 to 21; Ruth).

(For each member of the Bible class.)

No one would hesitate for a moment to admit that the Book of Ruth is a grateful and sorely needed bit of testimony to the presence and influence of other social conditions than those emphasized in the main portion of the Book of Judges. As historical evidence it may not seem valuable, since its origin is probably post-exilic; but even its idyllic picture is considerably justified by the appearance of such fine character, ideals, and leadership, as Samuel represents. Samuel, Saul, David, Jonathan, and Eli are good proof that the whole story of the earlier age is not given in the Book of Judges.

The appendix to the Book of Judges (chaps. 17-21) aims to illustrate the darkest and rudest aspects of that age, yet its contents have a brighter significance. The story of Micah and the Danites (chaps. 17, 18) clearly reveals the crudity of the current religious ideas. Imagine a man congratulating himself on his success in getting a wandering Levite to become the priest of a shrine whose image was made out of stolen silver, and thinking that he was now sure of Jehovah's blessing! Imagine also the joy of the Danites in gaining possession by theft of the priest, image and all! Yet it was much that so great a value was set on the externals of religion. The outrage at Gibeah (chaps. 19-21) was unspeakable; but its sequel was fair testimony to the existence of ethical standards, and the means taken to provide the men of Benjamin with wives (21:16-24) suggests the happy domestic side of life which the Book of Ruth describes.

The story of Ruth is unsurpassed for charm and tenderness. Slightly modernized, it would take high rank today as a short story. It is first of all an idyl of sound, strong, womanly character. Ruth has the self-devotion, the reverence, the industry, the modesty, the courage, and the ready obedience, which entered into typical Hebrew womanhood. Again it stands for the truth, so sorely needing enforcement, at least in post-exilic times, among the Jews, that those of foreign birth might exhibit such character as well as those of their own nationality. It also undermines the intolerance often felt by Jews for outsiders by showing that Ruth, although a Moabitess, was recognized as a true servant of Jehovah, wedded to an influential Hebrew, and in time became the ancestress of King David. As a plea against intolerance it is very effective; as a picture of the social life of the Judges era it is

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beautiful and artistic: as a study in womanly ideals it is interesting; as a plea for sincere and simple faith it is effective.

II. Reference Literature.

The Book of Ruth needs little comment. The Expositor's Bible has a volume by Watson on "Judges and Ruth." A very conservative treatment of the book of Redpath is to be found in the Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, article, "Ruth;" a decidedly better one, in Davis's Dictionary.

III. Questions for Study and Discussion.

(To be allotted in advance, by the leader, for careful consideration, to members of the class.)

1. Evidence in the Book of Judges of Influences which Uplift. (1) Gather up illustrations of a clear and complete recognition of the authority of Jehovah. (2) Similar illustrations of a regard for morality, religious observances, and national justice.

2. The Setting of the Book of Ruth. (3) Note the type of community life described. Is there additional evidence that it was to be found in this period? (4) Is such peacefulness and prosperity explicable in view of the testimony of the Book of Judges?

3. The Leading Personality. (5) Did Ruth come from a people to whom the Israelites were friendly? (6) What vindicated her right to adoption into Israel? (7) What are the dominant features of her portraiture?

4. The Next of Kin. (8) What were the obligations of the nearest male relative to one in Naomi's condition?

5. The Purpose of the Story. (9) Considering the Book of Ruth as a whole, what seems to have been the special purpose of the writer?

6. Its Beauty and Force. (10) What constitutes the lasting charm of the book?

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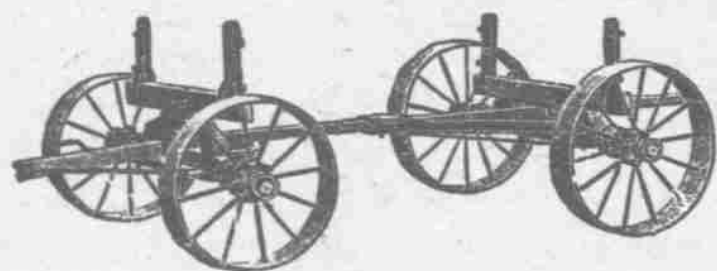
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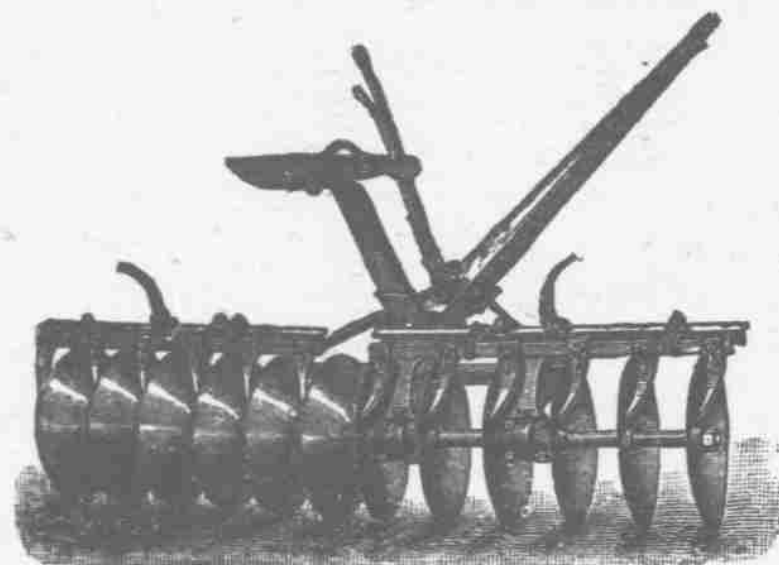
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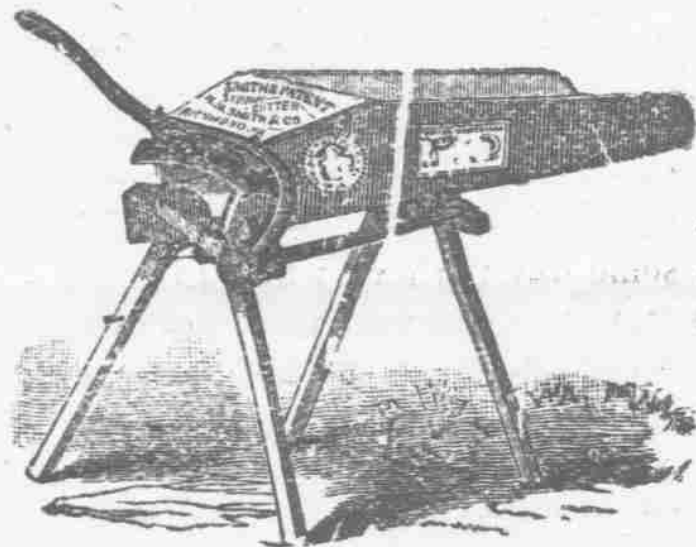


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